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ABSTRACT

The time to begin caring about declining enrollments in community college programs is before the program is started. Program planning should take into account why industry is demanding a given program "right now," avoid developing crash programs, and obtain and utilize all of the information possible including survey data, Labor Department statistics, and input from local businesses and community groups. Program planning should also involve, if possible, agreements with local industry, whereby program graduates will be given priority in hiring, and graduate salaries will increase on the basis of extra training. A final consideration for planning is the targeted student group and the prospects of that group providing a consistent student pool over time. Declining enrollments in existing programs can be dealt with in various ways, including the following: (1) establish agreements with agencies or industries for the provision of a minimum program enrollment, equipment for demonstration purposes, or financial support; (2) consider altering the type, content, or length of the program; (3) reduce the number of teachers in the program; (4) move the program to another campus or off-campus facility; (5) attempt a recruitment blitz among likely participants; (6) establish programs in correctional institutions or mental health institutions; and, as a last resort, (7) close out the program and find ways to effectively deal with its students, faculty, and equipment. (AYC)

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MANAGEMENT OF PROGRAMS WITH DECLINING ENROLLMENTS

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Occupational Standing Committee Presentation
May 15 & 16, 1980 - Orlando, Florida

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Occupational Standing Committee Presentation

May 15 & 16, 1980 - Orlando, FL

by Herbert E. Phillips, Pres., Lake City C.C.

Management of Programs With Declining Enrollments

I'd say first of all that this is probably the most humbling experience that I've had.

First of all, my other panel member bugged out. Alan Robertson decided he wouldn't be on the program with me. The second thing, of course, is that I have spoken and been a consultant in six different countries other than United States. In each instance I thought it was because I had done something or knew something and of course you are asking me to come here today and talk to you because I probably have the worst record of any body in the state on this matter. So that's a little humbling.

I drove from Lake City this morning knowing that it was Holiday Inn but Lake City only has one Holiday Inn. I was on time at Holiday Inn International Drive. I was on time at Holiday Inn Airport, but I was a little late at Holiday Inn South. So I could see that I qualified to make this presentation because I really am not too smart.

This whole matter is very important to us and we have had quite a bit of experience in it because we aggressively seek to have programs in our area and we do not have any kind of a population base, which is very bad. At one time when we were starting the college in '62, my board asked Jim Wattenbarger, "How big will we ever get to be?" There seems to be something about biggness, you know. And he said, "Well, if you get a president that'll really hustle some day or other you might get 500 students." This year we'll have 3,000 F.T.E. In a service area that has 46,000 people we will register between 9-10,000 people this year for something--which means you really have to go out and dig'em, and when you go out and dig'em sometimes you come up dry--and we've done that a few times too.

My first point is that the best time to care for declining enrollments is before you start a program. I think the first thing that you have to watch is being panicked into a crash program or having some kind of program "right now" because we just have to have it. The best example I know is how we got into one--Timber Harvesting. The American Pulpwood Association came in and said, "Look, we have all these schools that want to do this program for us and we have this big need. We want you to do it and we want you to do it this next fall." I was beginning to get a little cagey by then and I said, "O.K., we'll do it if you furnish us 15 live bodies or $30,000." I should have known right then the damned thing wasn't going to go because they gave me $30,000 rather than go on out and whip up 15 people. But if you go into a crash program because they "got to have it right now," be careful of it.

One thing they may be doing, if you don't know it, they may be trying to glut the market because when the market is glutted you can hire workers for less. We're starting or about to start--over a year now we've been working on a program called Arborist. At all these meetings we've had, man, they really make the money and they have all kinds of openings and everything else good. But we have proceeded very slowly and now we say we'll put this in as an option in our regular forestry program and if it turns out to be all right as an option then we'll have a separate arborist program.

My second point is get all the information that you can possibly get no matter what kind of information it is. Surveys I don't believe in much, but they do give you some little indication. One of the first surveys that we ever had we went over to Columbia High and surveyed the number of people who wanted to have a certain course that first year and found out that those kinds of surveys at the high schools have about a 20% accuracy. But if you're starting to go with a new program even 20% figures beat none. Labor Department statistics on need are really not all that good but you can put them in with the others. What's the local need, what's the state need, the regional need, or even the national need? There are a whole bunch of the 28 community colleges where we might as well recognize that we are

training people for export and the old business that you've got to have the need in your service area before you have a program is as archaic as the horse and buggy. This is no longer a viable thing. For instance, we turn out 40 golf course operators, assistant managers, greenskeepers or whatever you want to call them every year and in our whole five-county area we have three or four golf courses. I'd say that the local need is not there. At any rate, use the Labor Department statistics. Then go out and work with your local businesses or at least the area of your largest potential enrollment and see what their need is. Maybe have a banquet and get together. Some of you know that I just published a book on innovative practices in the United States in the small/rural two year colleges and one of the things was a survey idea that they use in Ketchikan, Alaska, and that is they go and take a survey instrument to every civic club in town, even church societies or anything else. They fill it out that minute while you stand there and pick them up when they walk out and you say for some purposes this won't do; but for the kinds of people they need trained the Rotary and the Kiwanis and the Lions and the Civitans are the people that are going to use them. It is a good gimmick and I think it's worthy of use.

Before you start a program see if you can make a deal with the industry. Such a deal as we won't hire anybody until we interview whomever you have available. Now my brother-in-law was the head of a two-year technical institution in Georgia for nine years and civil engineering was floundering up there with him at the same time it was floundering with me, but he went down to the state road department and made a deal with them that every draftsman that they hired they would first interview the available people out of Southern Tech's program. Needless to say his program in civil enginnering is still running. Mine is long defunct. If you can, make a deal with them before you start. Now we are trying to effect a deal with our auto body people in which they say that every time they have an opening they won't fill it until they check with us. If we get this deal we'll save the program, otherwise forget it, it's going to be kaput.

Then I think check the wages that are paid. I firmly believe, and you don't have to believe it, (maybe the unemployment situation makes you not believe it); but I firmly believe that is is a waste of time, effort, and state money to train some body to make minimum wage. And we were in the situation in Child Care where we were training them to make the same amount of money that the person dragged in off the street was going to make. And so we quit. We said to the operators, "You can just drag'em in off the street, we are not gonna fool with it." And we no longer do. So check the wages paid.

And then see if you can get some kind of firm committment. You know the parks people came to us, crying that they just had to have trained people in parks and if they could get these trained people the present low salaries will not continue, they were going to jump three pay grades and all that business. Well, we've had a Parks program now for nine years and hadn't a pay grade jumped yet and every time we have a meeting I yap on the same thing. If you could get something designated by the agency that's going to use them, city, federal, state, etc., then you have a right to start the program.

You ought to start programs that have some kind of state requirements. The Mental Health program didn't amount to anything in the State until further training became the way that workers were upgraded and now we have four Mental Health programs in the state, and they probably are going to go pretty well.

Then look at the type of people that you might get. Are all your registrants going to be veterans and when the V.A. money dries up the program dries up? Are all of them going to be people who are trying to upgrade themselves in Mental Health, for instance, and when all the positions are filled then no one's interested any longer? Are all these people on a short term or a one shot deal so that when you get them trained that that's the end of it? And I believe, sincerely, (and I have only been in the education business since 1931) but I believe that this would take care of a larger problem. This is a preventive kind of thing and we really get panicky.

You know the guy that controls half of Columbia County comes to me and says he wants a program in timber harvesting, I'm gonna think twice before I say we can't do it, and you know the larger you are the less of this kind of pressure you might have. But, nevertheless, you can do some things right there.

Now you are interested in solutions. So I'm going to start in with solutions. One, I've already give you--that's the agency or the industry agreement. For instance, on this timber harvesting thing, although they wouldn't give me 15 students, which is what I'd love to have them do, but they would allow us to use some of this expensive equipment. They'd bring it onto our campus and use it for demonstration purposes. We couldn't buy the equipment. Well, we can't buy those at $250-500,000 a piece. They bring them on campus and demonstrate and let our boys sit on them every now and then. So if you have some kind of agreement or industry agreement.

The next thing you can do, maybe, it is a possibility anyhow, is change the type of program. We now have our body and fender sitting in a one year moratorium while we're trying to determine what we're going to do with it and, we think, maybe one of the things that we ought to do is turn it into a fender bumping kind of program where the kid knows enough to work on his own car and he also knows a little bit more than the man that you grab in off the street and we reduce the two years to one, get him in, get him out, and get him employed. Right now they are taught all about the consistency of metals and how they bind together and the chemistry of that and the physics of the other thing and this guy out at Joe's Body Shop,which is a tin shed under a spreading oak tree, doesn't really care whether this cat knows anything. He goes out there and says do this and do that. So we're hopeful that this is one of the things you can do. You might change the kinds of programs you have.

We started Turf Grass. Turf Grass was a disaster. We barely survived for a year or two. We changed it to Golf Course Operations and we now have a waiting list of people to get in. So the change in the type of program. When I came in in 1962 and took over the University of Florida Forest Ranger School, they had a one year program in forestry and I said, "You know this is a two year school, let's have some two year programs." The foresters all fought me and fought me for about five years until one day we did make them agree that maybe we could start a little two year program as long as it didn't detract from our wonderful one year program. Now we have 220 students in forestry - about 20 of them in the one year program, about 200 of them in the two year program. So it might be that the type program you're running is not what you ought to be doing. So you need to look at that. And, of course, the type of program also includes length of program. Perhaps if you start in with declining enrollments that you could reduce the number of students. Maybe you could keep the same number of students and reduce the number of teachers. That's the main thing. There are a whole lot of things you can do on that score--we ran Parks Management one year without a teacher, probably the best year we ever had in Parks Management. We scheduled them 50 percent of their time to University Parallel. We scheduled all University Parallel classes on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday. On Thursday we had our Parks experiences determined by a national advisory committee which told who the consultants would be, what they would lecture about, how much of this they would cover and at what depth, what parks we would visit, the questions we would ask the park rangers and everything. This was all outlined and we didn't have a sign of a teacher. We had a fellow who had a degree in law, I believe, who was the coordinator that year. He had to see that the bus was there and that the microphone was on so that they could talk about what they had seen when they got back. So there is some kinds of things that you can do to reduce the expenses of the thing.

We have more applicants in welding than we can take care of. We're not going to hire another $20,000 teacher but we probably will put on someone who has no sign of a degree but is a welder who will come in there and serve as an aide.

And we'll go ahead then and pick up some more students.

Moving to another site may be a solution for those of you that have multiple campuses (and it lcoks like everybody has multiple campuses now except us and North Florida). Move to one of the other places if you can get enrollment there. For instance, take body and fender. We can pick up that paint booth and put it on the back of a truck and have it at Cross City Correctional Institute next week which is probably what we're going to do. So maybe you can change the location and take care of it.

Then you can put on a recruitment blitz and I, purposely, use the blitz part. When we were trying to make Child Care run our two child care teachers went out into the porject (the low rent apartments) and they went door to door. They knocked on every door--have you go children? do you work? are you trained?, and we existed one year from that blitz. And, of course, go to the industry that's involved. Aero Corporation sits on land next to us and we went over there. We run a human relations program for their managerial people. We run a sheet metal program for their people and they furnish us the tools, the instructor and part of the time we have it at their place and part of the time we have it at our place. But that is a result of our going over there and saying this is what we can do for you. Run buses to other towns. Run buses to the schools. And when we were trying to recruit for aircraft we'd take a bus out to a high school, bring in all those students that the teachers were trying to get rid of for the day anyhow, load'em up and bring them in there, we'd feed'em and take'em on a helicopter ride with our man flying it and then we'd let these kids run the helicopter up and down our 500 yard parking lot. They'd run that helicopter up and down tne parking lot themselves. So there are all kinds of things you can do if you got a little initiative and a little imagination.

And, of course, if you have any kind of prisoners in your area and I guess most of you at least would have a county jail. That's a captive audience. You can keep'em as many hours as you want.

You have no discipline problems because anytime they give you a hard time you just give their name to somebody and they get them out of the class. This works out very well. At the present time we have 615 prisoners that we're teaching. Of course we have 60 percent of the male prisoners in the state in our 5-county area anyhow. But at least at a county jail you have a place there where you can do some things. I don't know much about rehabilitation but the prison people tell me, I personally think that if you give'em a trade other than embezzling or safe cracking it might be there's a chance they'll follow the second trade and the prices that plumbers and electricians and all are charging now they'll make more money than they could cracking safes. So I think you could play on the rehabilitation bit. The other thing is that they made a study down at Union Correctional Institute and they found from this study that the number of discipline cases, the amount of disciplinary infractions that you had from a prisoner was in exact inverse ratio between that prisoner and the number of college credit hours he had. The more hours he earned the less problem he was to any of them--and the prison people love that kind of thing.

We got classes in the prisons, in the Mental Health Institution--even some patients - since we have a pre-release program at Macclenny. These people have been in the mental health institution for a good many years. They're not ready to go home. You have to teach them a lot of things. We have pre-release programs at the Correctional Center. We have nine vocational programs at the prison. So we think that you look around and see people--Oh, we got some classes in the nursing home. They say "what in the world is it going to do for them?" The same thing for them that any other person that comes in and audits or does any thing else. They take English literature for enjoyment or enlightenment.

Then if there are some people that are really fighting you to try to keep you from closing a program see if you can channel their energies into keeping it going. And then the last. After all else fails close it out. My God, you must have guts enough to do it and it's a real gutsey thing that you have to do. And I'll tell you about some of the programs since I've pulled out a batch of them. You need to have some back up: surveys, cost figures, lasting need, trends, all this to prove that

you ought to close it out. Then the next problem, what do you do with the equipment? You have to distribute it, sell it, you have to give it back to the state department and they have to distribute it, it gets to the other colleges and who signs for it, and who inspects it, and who carts it off, etc., and particularly if you got anything from the government. When we closed out aviation we had a plane from Piper and had two planes from the federal government and three or four helicopters and we had a horrible time handling those things. I think the last thing I did was to say, "See if you can lose a helicopter." It's ev... hard to lose them. Then what do you do with the students who are in the pipeline? You have a two year program and at the end of one year you're closing it out. What do you do with them?

And then you're going to find out when you start talking about closing some thing out you certainly get all these appeals, you get petitions, you get all that kind of thing and when you look behind'em, a lot of the faculty is promulgating it. The faculty is in collusion. Why shouldn't they be? You know, they're trying to save their job.

What do you do with the faculty? Try to find something else for them to do or just say, "Well, that's tough." And if you decide you are going to close them out, you have annual leave, you have contracts, you have sick leave, etc. And then you're faced with the agency that's involved. When we closed out aviation, so help me, the FAA man sat in the meeting and told me what the hell difference does it make whether or not they can find a job. All you have to worry about is getting them into a classroom and training them. That's the students' problem, getting the job. And then when you finally go to the board and say we want permission to close it out, we want permission to cut these people and there's so much pressure on the board they are apt to chicken out.

We closed out civil engineering which also closed out design and detail drafting. Distributive Education for high school students was discontinued when the state stopped paying both high school and the college. Child Care bit the dust because there were no requirements in the law.

The students were paid only a minimum wage and we had not properly determined the local demand. (I do not believe in training anyone to function at a minimum wage level.) When the Viet Nam war was completed all of the aviation programs went out the window; namely, air frame mechanics, power plant mechanics, and aviation general. We performed the function of starting three programs for a contributing high school which were taken over by the high school. At the end of two years auto body and fender work secured no registration, not even veterans, and we have declared a moratorium on that program. In the meantime we may institute it at Cross City Correctional. Our human relations program was done away with when the state project director disliked some of the things that we were doing. We now are immersed in developing a state-wide program called Life Skills.

I hope some of these suggestions will be helpful.

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